



A simple, if affecting, news item, now some twenty years old, inspired Jay Bolotin's *Limbus: A Mechanical Opera*. According to the story a huge boulder, perched for eons at the top of a hill somewhere in Kentucky, dislodged one day. In its path was a home, and in the home were three people: a young girl in one room, her mother and father in another.

The boulder crashed through the house, sparing the girl but coming to rest, full weight, on top of her parents, crushing them to death.

Bolotin has devoted, as he put it in a letter this August, "three years of 15-hour days and endless expense" to an obsessive effort to understand this event. Thus far, that effort has produced, in addition to the opera itself, an extensive suite

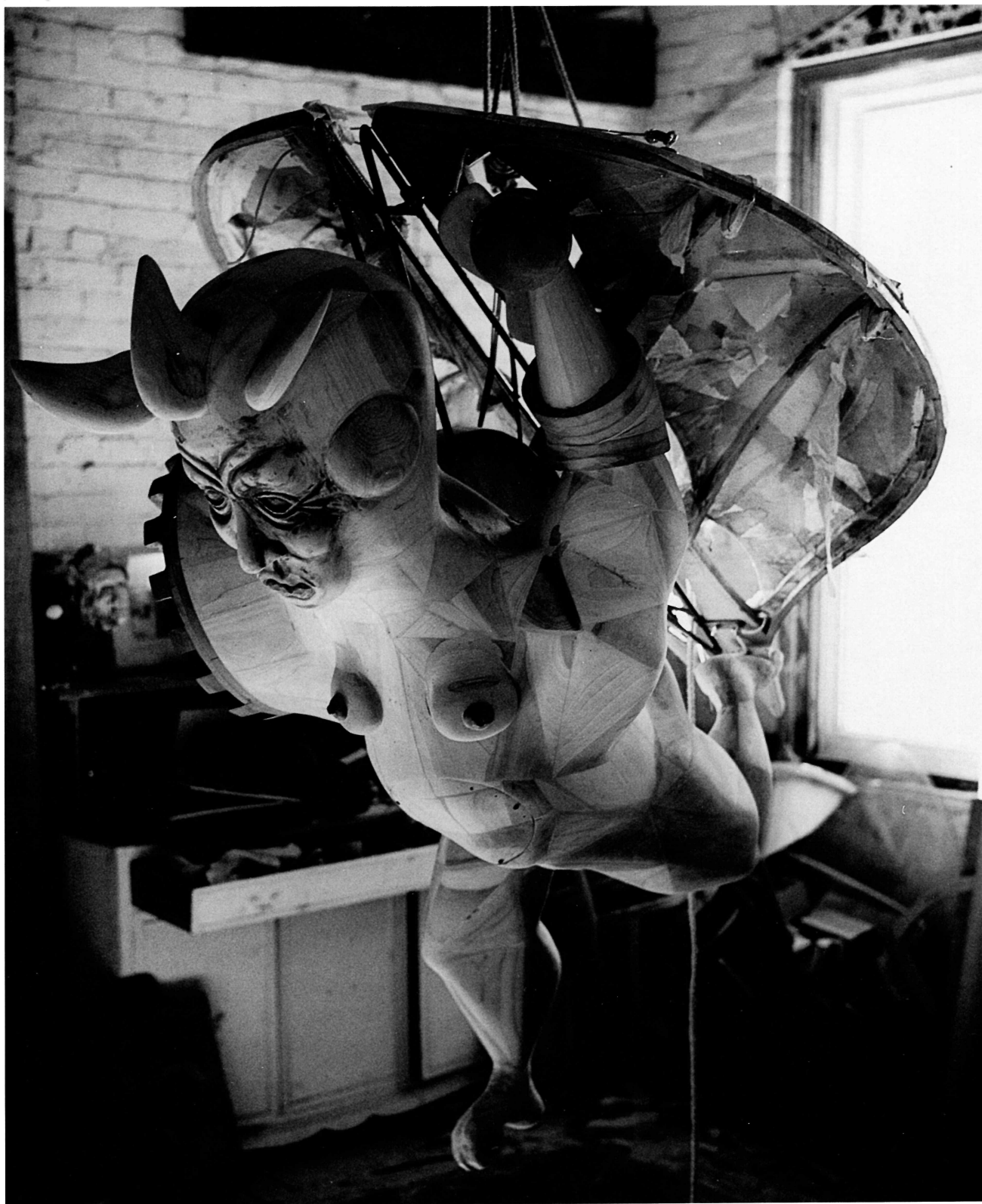
Technical drawings,
studies, and notes
from the artist's
journal



of prints (65 technically spectacular woodcuts, many of them hand-colored, published this year in an edition of 20 as *Limbus: The Source of a Mechanical Opera*) and a series of paintings. The unfinished "opera" was written and scored by Bolotin. It is also performed, for the most part, by him and a group of large-scale sculptures he is designing and building with the help of a shifting team of artists, technicians, friends, and hangers-on. An early version of the opera was presented June 28-July 2, 1995, at the Ensemble Theater, Cincinnati, as a "work in progress" featuring—in addition to Bolotin and his sculpted performers—Crow Grando, Michael Grando, Ken Kawaji, and Peter Rowan.

As a work of theater the current version of the opera has

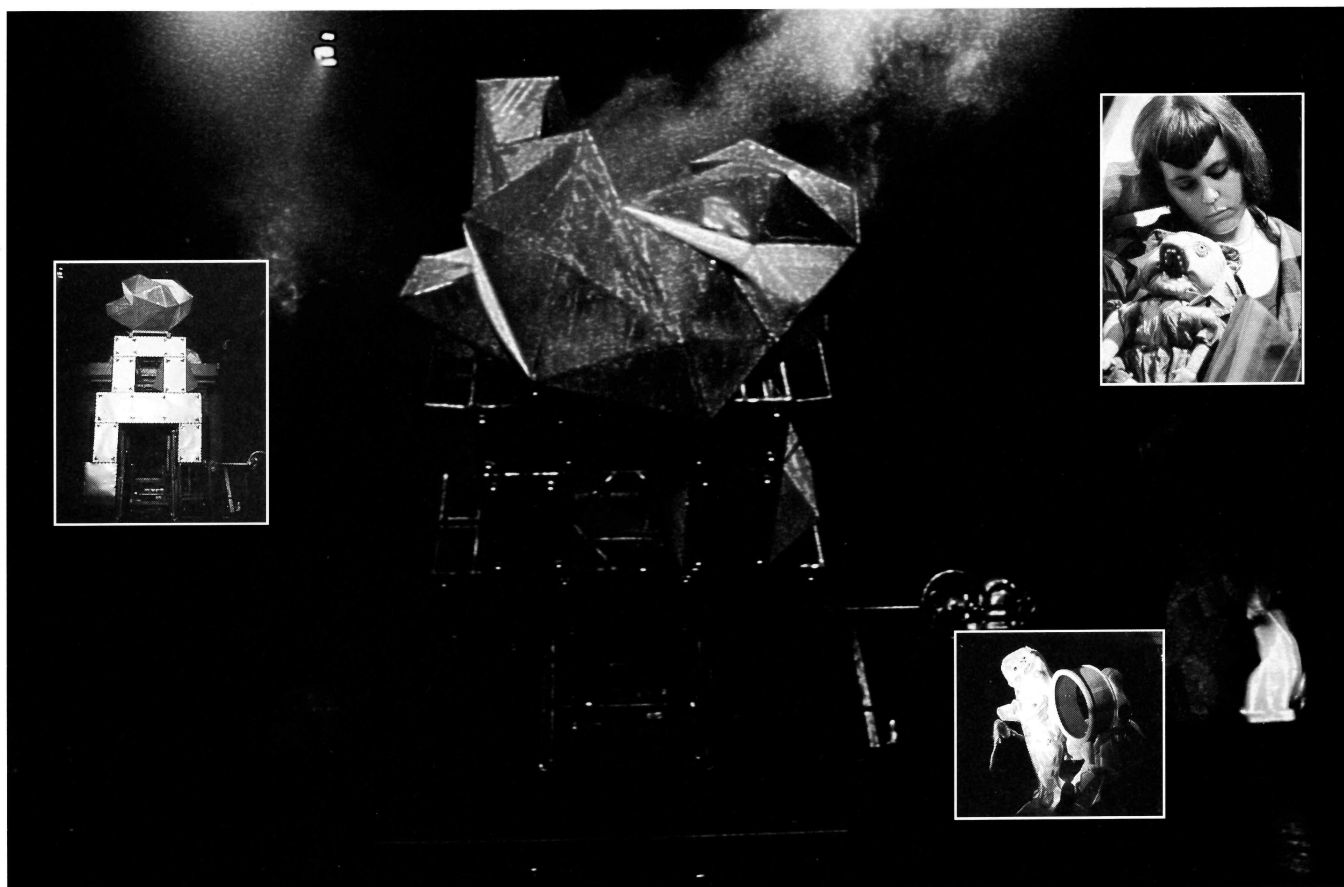
its flaws, a judgement the artist himself has ruefully pronounced ("You cannot stage an accident accidentally," he writes, by way of explanation). But if *Limbus* fails in any way, it is a glorious failure. And if the live actors and their interactions need rethinking, Bolotin's eerily affecting music (a solo performance he builds electronically into a full-scale orchestra), the poetic myth he has invented as a libretto, and the pathetic heroism of his sculptural "characters" are nothing short of inspiring. Even in their unfinished state, these sculptures have such tragi-comic vitality that we of The Contemporary Arts Center could conceive of no better tribute to the inauguration of the Aronoff Center for the Arts and its Weston Gallery than this exhibition and publication.



The job of the artist and that of the journalist are not so far apart as we might suppose.

Their methods may differ (the journalist assembles a collection of supposed facts, while the artist works in the arena of fabrication) but each sees his goal as the articulation of Truth.

The older we get as a society, the less we trust the journalist. We still believe in "facts," God bless us, but we've learned that their selection, the order of their presentation, the very form in which they are stated—all of these affect our understanding of the story. So, every morning, whether we are



Democrats or Republicans, old men or young women, eastsiders or westenders, we all curse the journalist for his failure to reflect the world as we know it to be.

Perhaps there is hope (admittedly daring in today's political climate) that our loss of faith in journalistic fact-gathering will lead to a new confidence in the artistic fabrication of truth.

Certainly, Jay Bolotin knows that each new piece of information cries out for further clarification, each additional statistic demands more data. How old was the girl? How big? How was she dressed? What color were her eyes?

More than this, Bolotin raises the question no who/what/when/where reporter would risk, which is: Why?

Only by creating a new event from the paltry remnants

Scenes from *Limbus: A Mechanical Opera*. At the Ensemble Theater, June 27, 1995. From left, clockwise:

The Boulder on the Tower; the Boulder descending; Crow Grando as Secunda with Lucy; the Drummer.

of the original story can Bolotin hope to get at the truths of Nature, Fate, and Irony. Surely that is what his otherwise cryptic subtitle, "To Deny the Existence of Metaphor," means. Bolotin's True Story is of Tuxedo, a kind of demigod who, weary of his earthly travels, rests against a boulder and, in the process, unknowingly dislodges it. The haunting score (seemingly composed of equal parts Kurt Weil, backwoods guitar, and drunken circus band) forces the action forward, leading toward a conclusion as inevitable as the gravity that tugs on the giant stone.

Other, parallel narratives proceed at the same time, and in the end the crash of the boulder is a death, a birth, and a battle, all at once. Ironically, all that the convergence of these powerful forces can ultimately produce is

an impotent little flash of light and poof of smoke.

There is another irony, which is that Bolotin's reinvented reality (this is not a story, remember—not a metaphor) itself raises as many questions as it answers. Bolotin calls this confounding situation "righteous ambiguity," and it results from his marvelous and futile attempt to make a concrete thing like a sculpture out of an abstract idea like Truth.

In the midst of this exhibition project, at one of those difficult points that every really good show goes through, he reflected on a particular work, a "beautiful Angel who is horrible and comical and would save us all and who has beautiful bent oak and canvas wings that will really flap, by God." Such is Jay Bolotin's extraordinary endeavor: to devise mechanical characters that could, by their own might, deliver us from our ignorance.

Most projects at The Contemporary Arts Center are the product of an intensive group effort, and this exhibition is no exception. All the staff of The Center has supported this undertaking, each in his or her own role, but essential contributions to the exhibition concept and its realization were made by Betsy Atzel, Carolyn Krause, Margaret Sambi, and Leah Stoddard. I would also like to recognize the professional approach and generous spirit of the Aronoff Center staff,

particularly Salli LoveLarkin, Dennis Harrington, and Melody Sawyer Richardson. Finally, of course, all of us owe a debt of gratitude to the artist, Jay Bolotin, for his cooperation and for his genius.

Charles Desmarais, Director
The Contemporary Arts Center

Secunda	Up in the gray sky
Tuxedo.	I wonder if God's smiling down
	Does it bode Evil or Good
	Idiot Wind
Secunda	This pounding that rattles my spine
	It is blessed it is fine
	It will always be mine
Tuxedo.	Boom Boom Boom Boom
Secunda	The evening is here
Tuxedo.	The sun has gone out
Secunda	Lucy-look there down the hill
Tuxedo	Am I lost - Am I found
Secunda.	That little house is my home
	But I feel in my bones
	They are strangers
Tuxedo	Idiot Wind
Secunda	Strangers
	Do I hear a drum
	Do I hear some lonely drummer
	Wandering in the hills
Tuxedo.	Idiot Wind
	Do I hear a gun
	Do I hear the voices
	Gathering by the garden gate

Images on the following pages are reproduced from woodcuts in Jay Bolotin's portfolio *Limbus: The Source of a Mechanical Opera*. Texts are from the libretto of *Limbus: A Mechanical Opera*.